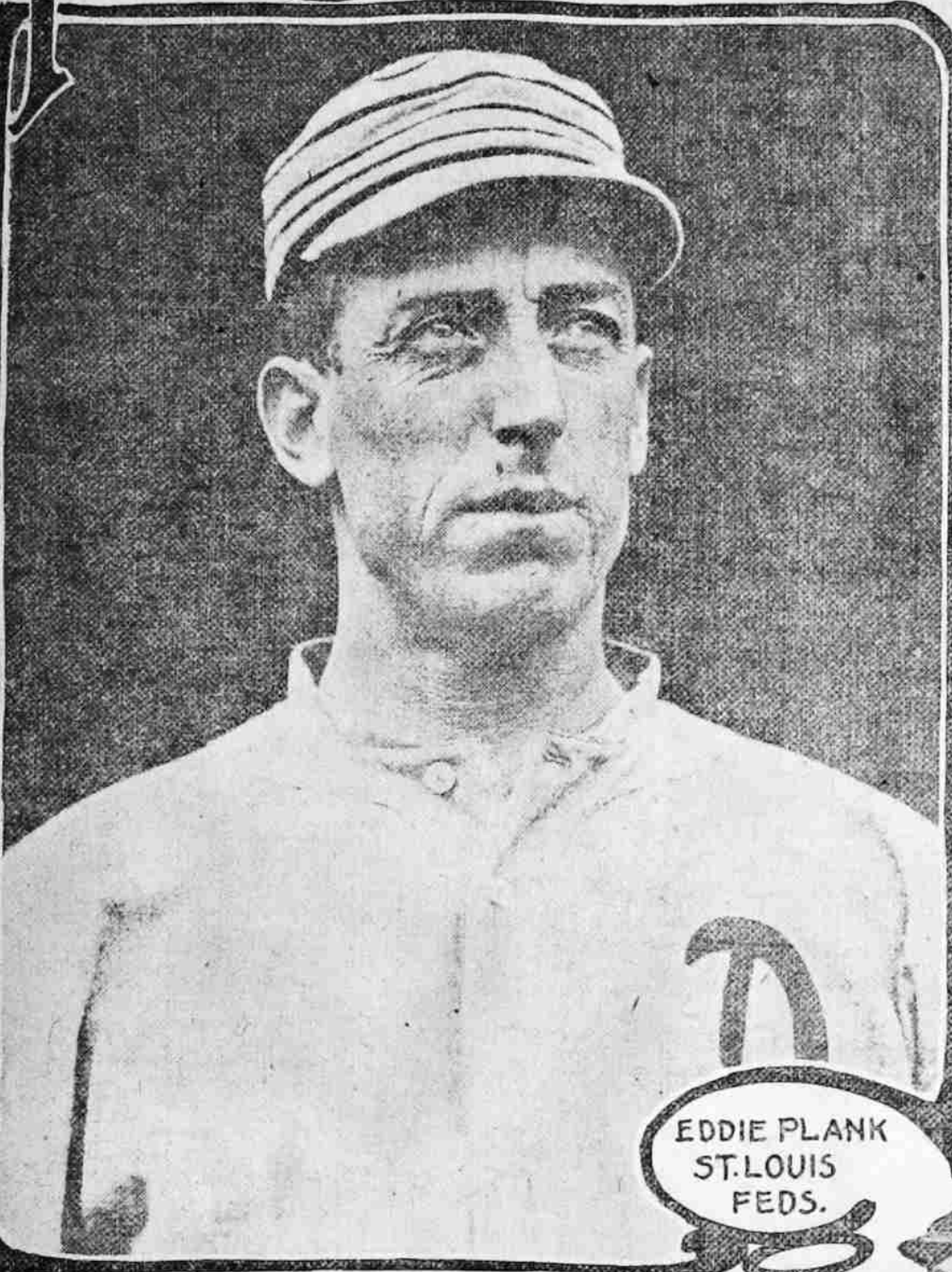
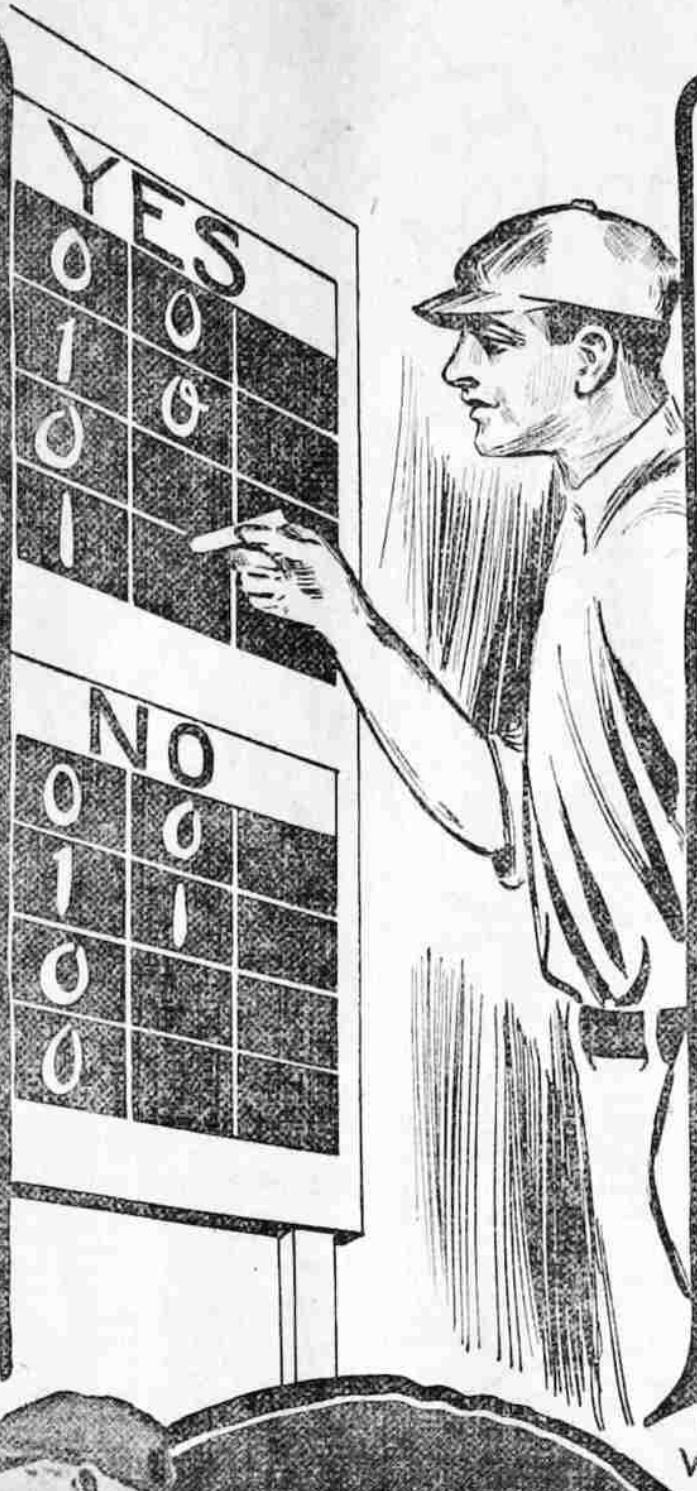


Magazine Feature Section

IS BASEBALL GOING BACK?



EDDIE PLANK
ST. LOUIS
FEDS.



WALTER JOHNSON
WASHINGTON —
AMERICANS

Fans Are Becoming More Educated and Demand That the Home Teams Win at Every Angle of the Season—Public is Turning to Municipal Ball Until Professionals Get Down to Business.

Not long ago, a Pittsburg Federal league pitcher named Hearn, with the general nickname of "Bunny," let the St. Louis Fed down minus a hit or a run in a ball game remarkable for its sharp fielding and "hair-raising" all-around play. As Hearn left the field, only his team mates showed any sign of appreciation. The crowd, apathetic, silent, made their way as quietly from the stands as if the home team had lost a sandlot game. There was not a cheer for the pitcher who had jumped into baseball's hall of fame and perched on a seat toward which Walter Johnson, Grover Alexander and many other twirling stars have looked enviously for seasons and seasons past.

Only a few days prior to this, the eccentric and erratic Mr. Reuben Marquard of the New York Giants, did the selfsame stunt, shutting out the hard-hitting Brooklyn team, hitless, in a hard-played contest. It was a home crowd and there were spasmodic cheers aplenty for the victor. But the long, frantic "rooting" of bygone days was lacking utterly.

Don't you remember, even a few seasons back, how a feat like that would have been the subject of baseball conversations for days and days wherever fans who had seen the game congregated? Two or three years ago, even a "home" crowd that had sat through nine innings of hitless ball, though their team had lost, would have given the visiting pitcher who pulled the stunt a regular ovation—not merely an enthusiastic complimentary hand-clapping and cheering, but one of those pour-out-on-the-field-and-pat-him-on-the-back send-offs.

Not, however, in the baseball year of 1915.

The late General Sherman expressed the matter in a nutshell. War surely is.

IT IS NOT THE WAR.

But it is not of the baseball war that I'm writing this week, though

the baseball war has much to do with the subject, but of the worst start any baseball season in the memory of the oldest fan has produced. The writer has seen most of the games played by all three leagues in one city of the circuit, and with a few exceptions, like Bunny Hearn's feat, or Slim Sallee's two-hit victory over Chicago in the St. Louis-Chicago National league series, the class of baseball, even for the earliest spring, has been so far below that of previous seasons that there is no comparison.

You can't blame the weather because, take it by and large, most of the teams had as good weather as usual on their training trips. You can't blame the managers because most of the managers have had as good, if not better material to work with than in previous years. You simply have to blame the unsettled conditions, in the minds of ball players, managers, magnates and fans, which have been brought about by the baseball war.

The players, with daily talk of peace ringing in their ears, a peace which many of them know would leave them high and dry without even a drink of water to solace them in their isolation, are nervous, unstrung, erratic. The managers are bitten by the same disease.

On the opening of the American league season, the St. Louis Browns met the Chicago White Sox. The exhibition ended 7 to 6 in favor of the Sox after 14 innings of as bush league ball as was ever seen on the sandlots. The spectators were kept continually on their feet as one team or another forged ahead. But they forged ahead after errors and poor judgment had placed them in scoring positions.

OTHER LEAGUES BELOW FORM.

After that game, fans one and all declared, "Oh, it's early and they'll settle down in a few days," speaking not of the Browns, but of both teams. And the next day the White Sox captured a 16 to 0 game that



Rube Marquard
New York Giants.

would have shamed two high school teams.

In the meantime, the Federals and Nationals are doing little better. In Brooklyn on one of the early days, one of the most remarkable exhibitions of how not to play ball lasted for almost three hours. A few days later, the Brooklyn Federals made a near record by scoring 10 runs in one inning.

In the National league, it was the same story, big scores or poor ball

behind small scores. New York, Boston, St. Louis, Chicago and Pittsburg all have been playing erratic ball.

Pitchers usually "get going" in various stages of the race, but it is left for 1915 to show a majority of the big league pitchers off their stride in the first six weeks, the teams playing poor ball behind them and the fans, disgusted, sitting apathetically through a game until some husky swatter poles the pill

over the fence and gives them something to talk about.

Talk about the world turned upside down! With the races but two weeks old, the Giants were at the bottom of the National league and the despised Quakers were making a runaway race of the first lap. In the American, the Athletics, who were believed to be strong, despite their dismemberment of last fall, were holding tight to the cellar with the Browns crowding them hard,

while the Detroit team, with virtually no pitching, was perched on the top of the heap. And Cleveland and New York, the "joke" teams of the league, were winning ball games at a rate that gave the dopsters extreme pains in the cerebrum.

MORE DOPE GIVEN A SHOCK.

Over in the youngest major league, the Kansas City club, picked by all critics as a hard-hitting minor league outfit devoid of baseball brains, has been coupling its hitting punch with base stealing and "inside ball" and with the aid of good pitching was going at a great clip, while the St. Louis team, considered a sure factor in the race under the guidance of Jones, was upholding the old White Sox record of "hitless wonders" without the White Sox ability to score a run and hang on to it for nine innings. Newark (last year's Indianapolis pennant winners) appears, in the first two weeks of the season, to be the only major league ball club which is running anywhere near to form from the barrier.

It's a great life!

Twice in the first two weeks, the only times he went on the mound, the great Christy Mathewson took the count. Doak, Cheney, Rudolph, James, Scott, Plank, Bender and other star pitcher have been driven to the shower this month, or have tasted hard defeat because of their own poor pitching, while lesser lights have come through and won ball games.

And it has been poor baseball. Four times this year I have seen teams win ball games in which the pitcher had every license in the world to win while the team behind him should have lost by about 40 to 0. Grover Lowdermilk, who appears to be the early season pitching star of the American league, won from the White Sox in a 2 to 1 game in which only his pitching kept the Browns from defeat. Behind him there were errors, dumb base-running, little hitting and all-around poor baseball. And against him, the White Sox played the dumbest sort of baseball, and did not take advantage of the poor work of the Browns to win as almost any major league ball club of last year or the year before could have done.

MUNICIPAL BASEBALL DRAWS.

All this means that the war has caused a deterioration in the class of big league baseball and it means something else. One Sunday recently the St. Louis Cardinals drew 10,000 persons, while the St. Louis Federals had a crowd of less than 1,500. On the same day, the St. Louis Municipal League, an amateur organization, drew more than 26,000 persons at their games.

If the figures are worth a cent, the

public is tired of baseball on the scrambled plan. The fans want to see the old days when they knew the players on a team and knew that those players would last out the season. They want to see the time when they rooted for one team or two. They want to see the days when a good ball game was the rule rather than the exception.

The public is becoming educated, too. The old cry of packing the stands so long as the home team wins still prevails, but not to the degree it did a few years ago. Now the home team has to win and play good ball at the same time to draw the patronage. And good ball is the exception in the early days of the present race.

But, of course, matters will settle down, though they will be longer in settling this season than they once were.

But with municipal baseball in most of the big league towns, the amateurs will draw the crowds as long as the professionals are playing amateur baseball.

An Utter Futility.

Seeking to make a series on "How I Became Champion," as told by Jess Willard, worth reading. Here is our idea for such a story—it can be told briefly and still contain all the essential facts:

By Jess Willard.

I knocked out Jack Johnson, the title holder, in the twenty-sixth round.

It Wasn't So in the Olden Days.

There is much psychology in baseball. "Bull" McCormick—now Manager Harry McCormick of Chattanooga, used to go up to pinch-hit, figuring he had a pitcher at a disadvantage and nervous. "Bull," full of confidence, was a demon pinch-hitter. Nowadays, pinch-hitters stride up to the plate fearful lest they fail to "make good." Consequently, we have no modern-day "Bull" McCormick.

Mrs. Sallee Thanks Mrs. Britten. We have it on pretty reliable authority that when Harry Sallee's bride learned that the Cardinals' owners had insured the life of the tall southpaw, along with the rest of the players, she said: "Fine! Now I shan't have to keep telling you to be careful every time you go out!"

Rules for the Rabid Rooter. You're not up to date this season if you fail to accuse the umpire of numerous and sundry breaches of neutrality.

Always greet a new umpire in a friendly way—but, like most managers, with marked reservations. You are not timely unless you refer to a player's head as an onion. Know a baseball, also, by no other name.

Do not say "infield out." The proper term is "infield demise."

When the Giants are traveling and their train rounds a curve, at least half a dozen players have to hold on tight to Jim Thorpe, the athletic Indian. He instinctively starts to seize a bat, jump off the train and swing at said curve.